



Survivors: British Merchant Seamen in the Second World War

G H Bennett, G. Harry Bennett, Roy Bennett

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Winning the Battle of the Atlantic was critical to Britain's survival in the Second World War. The British Merchant Navy suffered enormous losses of both ships and men, particularly in the early years of the war. Sailing through U-boat wolf-packs across the Atlantic, or on the perilous routes to Malta and Murmansk, took a special kind of courage. Ships often sank within minutes of being torpedoed. Survivors is the history of this epic struggle. It is a graphic account of how the ships were attacked and sunk, how crews reacted, how they attempted to launch their lifeboats and how they ended up swimming or clinging to debris, or making long voyages in lifeboats or on rafts. Death might come at any stage, yet the will to live and the resourcefulness and skill of the seamen enabled a surprising number to survive.

"There was a terrific smash and everything was pandemonium on deck. The wheel house collapsed on top of me and I was trapped by the concrete slabs which had fallen on me and pinned me to the deck. I think that the ship sank in about thirty seconds after breaking in two ... Although I was trapped, I could see everything over my head. The stern burst into flames and I saw flames forward. I could see the water coming up and coming over my head. The ship hit the bottom and turned over, the debris was thrown off me and I was released and I came to the surface."--Sinking of SS Abukir, 28 May 1940



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